

PENTECOST 2C

June 6, 2010

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

1 Kings 17:17—24 • Psalm 30 • Galatians 1:11—24 • **Luke 7:11—17**

We've all seen the commercials. With television cameras rolling, a brand new car is propelled down a track into a concrete barrier. Smash! Air bags explode. Crash dummies recoil from the impact. The test is repeated on dozens of new cars. Why this waste of automobiles? Researchers are trying to learn from the collisions *so that* they can make cars safer for the times when real people are involved in a real accident.

A train speeds down a track and collides with a car, compacting it into a small slab of metal. What will be done with the footage caught on tape? It will be shown to drivers education students *so that* they know what could happen if they carelessly try to beat a train at a railroad crossing and are hit by it. From collisions like these lessons are learned.

In our gospel reading for this morning Luke tells us about a collision that took place at a city called Nain. It wasn't a collision between trains or automobiles. Two groups of people collided at the city gate.

A procession of death and sorrow met a procession of life and hope. At the front of one was a man who had been defeated by death; at the front of the other was a man who would defeat death. The two groups collide *so that* the world could see what happens when the man who is life confronts the world of death.

We're told that as Jesus and his disciples approached the city gate, they saw the funeral procession of a dead man. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. This is some very important information for us. You see, in Jesus' time a widow's son would have provided for her needs. When the widow's husband died, the husband's property would have passed to their son. The son would have continued to care for his mother, providing all her basic necessities for life: food, clothing, and shelter. When the son died, however, the property would have passed to his heirs; this would not have included his mother. Without a son to care for her, the widow's life was over, every bit as much as the son's. There was no social safety net: no Social Security, no public housing, no Food Stamps, no Medicare. There was no one left to care for her, no one left to provide the basic necessities of life.

It is no small wonder that the woman was weeping. Not only was her husband and son dead, but her life would soon be cut short through lack of food, clothing, and shelter. She wept over not only the loss of her son, but she also mourned her own impending death.

It is no small wonder, then, that when Jesus saw the widow, he felt compassion for her. But his next action is not one that we typically consider to be compassionate: he told her not to cry. Imagine the shock of the mourners, to hear some stranger tell the widow she shouldn't be crying at her own son's funeral!

Then Jesus' next move was even more shocking – he reached out and touched the bier on which the dead man lay. Jesus caused himself to become ritually unclean by touching the funeral stretcher. It is no wonder the funeral procession stopped! This was shocking and thoroughly inappropriate behavior.

The drama only escalates... Jesus then speaks to the dead man. Surely the on-lookers must have been thinking him mad! Not only had he told a woman to stop crying and made himself to be unclean by touching the bier, but now he's talking to a dead man!

Just when the mourners must have thought it couldn't get any more shocking, the dead man sat up, and began to speak. I can just imagine that some must have gasped in shock and disbelief while others screamed, and even a few passed out from the shock.

Wouldn't you just love to know what the man said??? But Luke doesn't tell us. What he might have said isn't really important, for our purposes. For our purposes, there are three things we need to take away from this story.

First, and most importantly, Jesus saw a woman and had compassion for her. She hadn't done anything to deserve his intervention. He didn't even know her. How could she have done anything to deserve the gift he gave her? And yet he immediately knew the depth of her problem. He acted to bring life to not only her son, but also to her.

This is how Jesus comes to us. He saw us, in the depth of our sin, captive to death. Jesus saw our need and responded. His gift to us is immediate and totally unmerited. There is nothing we have done – nothing we could EVER do – to deserve his gift of grace.

We can't earn grace, as much as we might like to try. I am reminded of those old Smith-Barney commercials. Do you remember the ones? They featured John Houseman declaring, “They make their money the old-fashioned way... they *EARN* it.” And yet, we can't earn God's grace. This is the problem with human nature. We would much rather *earn* something. It takes a great deal of humility to accept something for nothing. We can't beg, borrow, or steal it; we can only accept it as free. We can only open our hands to receive this tremendous undeserved gift that God offers, and in humility say, “Thank you, Lord.” Jesus takes the death we deserve, and in its place gives us life. Through our baptism into his death, we are raised from certain death to eternal life.

In this miracle the kingdom of God has come to the man and his mother, through the touch and words of Jesus. We pray in The Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come." Luther reminds us in his *Small Catechism* that, "Our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, *so that* through the Holy Spirit's grace we believe God's Holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity."

Luke says that Jesus gave the man to his mother. The man was raised to life *so that* he might care for his mother. This is the second lesson for us today: That we, too, are raised for a purpose. According to Luther, we are raised *so that* we may live godly lives. It is important to remember that Jesus comes to us first, with completely undeserved grace. And having received that gift with open hands and nothing to offer in return, we are then called to respond with godly living.

Simply put, "godly living" is loving God and our neighbor. Loving God begins with knowing who we believe in, who has given us this wonderful gift of life, and responding accordingly. Godly living means being a disciple. It begins with immersing yourself in the seven marks of discipleship: praying, studying, worshiping, inviting, encouraging, serving, and giving. Pray daily. Study – read the Bible, preferably with fellow believers. Worship regularly with the faith community. Invite others to share in the life you have received in the church. Encourage others in their faith. Serve the less fortunate. Give freely of what you yourself have been

given – yourself, your time, and your possessions. These seven – prayer, study, worship, invitation, encouragement, service, and giving – are the marks of a disciple, one who leads a godly life out of joyful thanksgiving for what God has first given you.

The third and final lesson from today's Gospel story is that the people saw this miracle and immediately began to proclaim. They said, “A great prophet has risen among us!” and “God has looked favorably on his people!”

Just like the onlookers in today's story, we, too, are to proclaim having been touched by Jesus. We who have been raised from death to life are to glorify the God who has done this marvelous thing for us. Who will proclaim, if not us who have been touched by Jesus and raised from death?

A great prophet has risen among us! Worlds collide. Death meets life. God has indeed looked favorably on his people by sending to us the Lord of life himself.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.

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